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ABSTRACT

The 1978 study, which was the first to use the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) with rural youth, compared the self-image of rural and urban adolescent girls and sustained the hypothesis that adolescents in larger communities think more highly of themselves than adolescents in rural communities. Most previous studies, ambiguous with regard to the effect of race and socio-economic status on self-image, found age and sex to be significant factors. The OSIQ was administered to 127 randomly selected high school seniors of both sexes in a white, middle class, midwestern rural community in an economically depressed area. The 3-way analysis of results revealed that adolescent girls had a significantly poorer self-image than boys; younger girls had a poorer self-image than older girls; adolescent rural girls of all ages had a poorer self-image than their urban and suburban counterparts; and rural adolescents in general thought more poorly of themselves than urban adolescents. The striking generality of the results across scales is possibly explained by socio-economic environment and family role. Rural family atmosphere, often devoid of hope, accomplishment, and pride, could easily cause low self-esteem. The findings apparently imply similarities between rural and inner city youth. (SB)

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The Self-Image of Rural Adolescent Girls

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Introduction

It is commonly believed that the nature of the community in which one grows up has an important influence on psychological development. Demographic variables, such as ethnic background, community type and size, region of the country, and socioeconomic status, generally serve as variables to be considered when sampling for large surveys. These demographic variables are of primary interest in most sociological studies.

In this study we shall focus on the self-image of adolescent girls in a rural community. Other demographic variables will also be discussed.

Community Type and Adolescent Self-Image

It may be argued that adolescence is a critical time for seeing an impact of community type on self-image. Adolescents are developing a sense of themselves and frequently do this by identification with their schools and communities. "School spirit" is probably never higher than among teenagers.

These times of rapid mass communication make it more likely than ever before that individuals, particularly adolescents, would make cross-community comparisons. We can read about or see on television accounts

of life in New York City as well as in "Smalltown, USA". Hence, we would expect that teenagers would have some feelings of themselves which are influenced by the size and nature of their communities. The focus on size is a common one in our society, with a prevalent belief that bigger is better. This focus would lead us to predict that adolescents in larger communities would think more highly of themselves than would those in smaller communities or rural areas.

On the other hand, there is a recent trend valuing the less hectic pace and stronger bonds among people that are more typical of smaller, more rural communities. This trend would lead us to hypothesize that youth in smaller rural communities may have better self-images than those in larger ones.

Studies of Urbanicity

What can previous studies tell us about the validity of our alternative hypotheses? Relatively few studies have examined the relation of urbanicity to self-image. Since there is reason to believe that there are historical changes in urban/rural differences (Manning, 1975), we have limited our review to studies since 1960. We also discuss only studies which include female subjects. As we might expect, previous studies are not in agreement on which environment is related to better self-image.

Trowbridge, Trowbridge, and Trowbridge (1972), studying midwestern

urban and rural boys and girls aged 7 to 14 years, found that those youth from the rural area had higher self-esteem as measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Similarly, Wendland (1968) found that young (aged 12-13) rural southern adolescents had more positive self-images than their urban cohorts. Self-image was measured in this study with the Tennessee Self-concept Scale (TSCS). In a study also using the TSCS but with northern high school students, Cook (1969) similarly found higher self-concept among rural youth, but, in addition, these youth were more defensive.

In contrast, Olsen and Carter (1974), using the Michigan State Self-Concept of Academic Ability instrument, found that young (aged 8-12) urban youth had a higher academic self-concept than their rural counterparts. There are several aspects of this study which could explain the results differing from those mentioned above. The subjects are preadolescents; yet the Trowbridge's (1972) sample included children of this age but they found no significant age effects. The Olsen study focussed on disadvantaged youth; but as we discuss below, this factor has no clear relation to self-image. An alternative explanation is offered by Olsen and Carter: they speculate that rural children considered school achievement to be less important than did the urban children. They point to evidence that rural educational facilities are inferior thus rendering the devaluing of education an adaptive response to some real, external limitations. The link between the importance of school achievement and academic self-concept remains, how-

ever, to be established. It seems that we could just as easily argue that a high value on education could lead to lower academic self-concept because of the pressure to achieve in that sphere. We must conclude that clarification of the relation between values, particularly those related to education, and self-image, requires further investigation.

Prendergast, Zdep and Sepulveda (1974), studying a large national sample of more than 1800 girls from ages 9 to 17, found no differences in self-image among girls living in large or small cities, suburban areas, or rural areas. Their measure of self-image consisted of judgments of self on six items in three areas: ability, appearance, and interpersonal relations.

Hence, three of five studies comparing self-images of rural and urban youth found rural youth with higher self-perception. Only one found the reverse, and the construct there was academic self-concept. The final study found no differences.

Other Demographic Variables in Relation to Self-Image

In evaluating previous research relating community type to adolescent self-image, we must unconfound any community size effect from other community and subject variables in the sample. For example, socioeconomic status (SES) is a variable frequently examined in relation to self-image. Again, the results are ambiguous with some studies finding that higher

SES youth have better self-image (Ausubel and Ausubel, 1963; Deutsch, 1960; Long and Hendersen, 1968; Wylie, 1961); while other studies obtain the reverse result (Clark and Trowbridge, 1971; Soares and Soares, 1970; Trowbridge, 1970, 1972; Zirkel and Moses, 1971). Still other studies suggest that no significant difference in self-image exists for youth of different SES groups (Coleman, 1966, Cook, 1969; McDaniel, 1967; Scott, 1969). The situation is similar for race: some studies find that blacks have higher self-image than whites (Powers, 1971; Wendland, 1969) while others find the reverse (Ausubel and Ausubel, 1963; Brunner, 1965; Deutsch, 1967). Gaier and Wamback (1960) found no racial differences in self-image, at least among females. Prendergast and colleagues (1974) have suggested a time trend here with more recent studies finding higher self-image among black youth.

Age is another important variable to consider when examining adolescent self-image. While there again is some lack of consistency in the literature, most studies (e.g., Offer and Howard, 1972; Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg, 1973) find that younger adolescents have a poorer self-image than older youth.

We are focusing in this paper on girls, but we should mention the sex-related differences in self-image. Many studies (e.g., Gove and Herb, 1974; Offer and Howard, 1972; Offer, Ostrov, and Howard, 1977; Simmons and Rosenberg, 1975) find that adolescent girls have poorer self-images than adolescent boys, especially younger adolescents.

Little is known about the causes of this sex-related difference though it likely is multidetermined (e.g., Petersen, 1978). The effect of the women's movement on the self-image of adolescent girls has not yet been examined.

Methods

The Sample

The primary subjects for this study were 127 randomly selected high school students (61 boys and 66 girls)[1] from a midwestern rural community. This small community is predominantly white and middle-class. The high school (grades 9-12) enrolled 1550 students in 1977-78, about two thirds of whom lived outside the town of less than 8,000 people. We had hoped to obtain comparison data from suburban and urban communities of similar socio-economic status and ethnic background within the same state. This was not possible so we used comparison samples from the large pool of samples which have completed the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire. The younger girls (n=27 aged 13 to 15) were compared with an upper middleclass suburban sample (n=278). The older rural girls (n=38 aged 16 to 18) were compared with a middle class urban sample (n=154). A second midwestern rural sample (n=42), collected at the same time as the rural sample described above, was also available for comparison. This sample includes juniors and seniors from three very small rural schools.

The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire

The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) was developed in the

[1] One subject of each sex provided incomplete data and were excluded from the analyses.

1960's as a self-descriptive personality test of adjustment (Offer, 1969; Offer and Howard, 1972). It measures adjustment in eleven areas which represent important aspects of the psychological world of the teenager. These include Impulse Control, Emotional Tone, Body and Self-Image, Social Relations, Morals, Sex Attitudes, Family Relations, External Mastery, Vocational and Educational Goals, Psychopathology, and Superior Adjustment. In addition, a total score is calculated. Each of the 130 items consists of a statement with a 6-option Likert-type response scale.

The OSIQ has been used in numerous studies with thousands of teenagers both in the United States and abroad. Data have now been obtained on a cross-section of socioeconomic levels. This is the first report using the OSIQ with rural youth.

The Design

We shall report the results of three analyses. In the first, we employed a two-way factorial design examining sex and age effects for the rural sample. We next compared the younger and older rural females to samples in the OSIQ data pool. Finally, we compared the rural data to another set of rural data obtained in a nearby midwestern state. Multivariate analysis of variance was used with all three designs. The procedure

used controls for unequal group sizes.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations for the younger (aged 13-15) and older (aged 16-18) rural males and females on the OSIQ scale scores and total score are shown in Table 1. The items are scored so that the higher the average scale score, the poorer the self-image in terms of that scale. Note that most of the average scale scores are between 2 and 3, indicating that self-image generally is more positive than negative. The standard deviations are quite stable.

Table 1 about here

Sex and Age Differences

In Table 2 are shown the results of the sex and age comparisons for the rural sample. As expected from previous research, the girls have a significantly poorer self-image than the boys. The multivariate effect of sex is highly significant. Girls have a poorer self-image than boys on three scales: Emotional Tone, Body and Self-Image, and Psychopathology.

Boys are significantly lower than girls on Morals. In a study of OSIQ data with eleven different samples, boys and girls were different in all but Emotional Tone (Offer and Howard, 1972). Girls had lower self-image on Impulse Control, Body- and Self-Image, Sexual Attitudes and Psychopathology. Boys thought worse of themselves on Social Relationships, Morals, Family Relationships, External Mastery, and Educational Goals. Although the overall sex difference is similar to that obtained previously, fewer significant differences appear in these data.

The finding that boys score lower than girls on Morals, is quite different from that proposed by Freud (1925) who suggested that females are morally inferior. This result with the OSIQ Morals scale holds for normals, delinquents, and disturbed youth in the United States and in several foreign countries (Offer and Howard, 1972; Offer, Ostrov, and Howard, 1977). The only exception is in Israel where the reverse result was obtained (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977.

There were no overall (multivariate) age differences. Only two scales showed age differences: Body- and Self-Image, and Vocational and Educational Goals; with both scales younger youth had lower self images. Offer and Howard (1972) found the latter result but not the differences on Body- and Self-Image. Given pubertal changes and other effects of early adolescence, the existence of an age difference with this scale among rural youth makes sense. Offer and Howard (1972) also found older youth with a better self-image on Social Relationships, Morals, Family

Relationships and External Mastery. Younger youth were better adjusted in terms of Emotional Tone and Sexual Attitudes.

Younger Adolescent Girls

The young rural adolescent girls were compared with a similarly aged upper middle-class suburban sample. The results are shown in Table 3. The multivariate test demonstrates that the self-images of these groups differ significantly, with the rural girls having poorer self-images. An examination of the univariate tests shows that these differences obtain for the total score and all scales except Sex Attitudes, a scale which seldom differentiates even among disturbed, delinquent, and normal youth (Offer and Howard, 1972). The magnitude of the differences is large, averaging about two-thirds of a standard deviation unit.

Table 3 about here

Older Adolescent Girls

The older rural adolescent girls were compared with a middle-class urban sample of the same ages. As shown in Table 4, the results are strikingly similar to those obtained with younger girls, with the effects of slightly larger magnitude. This similarity suggests that the differences may be due to community type rather than to social class.

Table 4 about here

We recently obtained data from another rural community, thus enabling a comparison of two rural communities. These data (Community B) were collected at the same time as the rural data just presented (Community A). A comparison of self-image in the two rural communities is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 about here

The overall effect of sex is significant, as expected. Community is also a significant effect, with youth in Community B (three small rural schools) showing better self-image than Community A youth. Four scales show significant community differences: Body- and Self-Image, Family Relations, External Mastery, Psychopathology, as does the Total Score. These are fewer scales than the number that differentiate rural from urban or suburban girls but still a substantial number. Another analysis not presented here shows that rural Community B has generally lower self-image than the urban comparison sample, which supports the general notion presented in this paper that the rural adolescent girl has a lower self-image than the urban one.

Discussion

The results clearly suggest that rural adolescent girls feel worse about themselves than do urban and suburban girls. This result is not limited to specific aspects of self-image but obtains for all scales except Sex Attitudes, which seldom differentiates between any groups. How can we explain these results? The contradictory findings of previous research are of limited usefulness. Three studies found higher self-image among rural youth, one found the reverse, while one found no differences. Considering that the only previous study finding lower self-image among rural youth was of academic self-concept of pre-adolescents, the results of the present study differ from what we might expect.

We did obtain data on background and sex role attitudes from these girls which may help explain within-samples differences. Any such differences could serve to explain between-sample differences as well, though we have no supporting data for such a possibility.

The generality of our results across scales is striking and rules out any explanations about differential strengths and weaknesses among girls in rural versus other communities. We might also note that similar results were obtained for boys (Petersen, Offer, and Kaplan, 1978). Why would these rural youth have poorer self-images?

Possible artifacts in these data should be explored first. It is possible that the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire is not as valid with rural youth as it has proved to be with urban and suburban youth, and measures something other than self-image. Our experience in administering the questionnaire to rural youth, however, gives us no reason to question the validity of the OSIQ. The rural youth had no difficulty with the items and were interested in answering them.

A second possible confounding factor is that the urban and suburban comparison data were obtained ten years ago. Historical trends in adolescent self-image could be responsible for a general decrease in self-image from 1967 to 1977.

The comparison of the two rural communities suggests that: (a) both similarly are lower in self-image than the comparison groups and (b) rural community A youth have lower self-images than those youth in community B. One salient difference between the two rural communities is school size. Adolescents in community A attend a relatively large centralized school while those in community B attend much smaller schools. A further difference may relate to the economic level of the communities. Community A is an economically depressed area.[1] Community B is a rich farming area. On the other hand, Cook (1969) for example, found that high school youth from a disadvantaged rural area were higher in self-concept compared to those in an affluent suburb. Historical times, however, may play a role

[1]The county ranks 75th(of 87) in per capita income for this state. The unemployment rate in the community is 8%.

here. Jobs are more difficult for youth to obtain these days and their availability or lack may be more important now than in the 1960's.

The generally lower self-image found here among rural youth may relate to the greater opportunities for youth in urban areas. The trend in our country, abating only recently, is toward larger cities and fewer Americans living in rural areas (Manning, 1975). Indeeed, the population of the rural community (A) studied here declined from 1960 to 1970. It seems possible that growing up in an anomalous area might lead youth to feel isolated from the mainstream. Manning (1975) concludes that the need to move to cities is even greater for girls than boys. At the same time, rural schools and communities do not equip youth for urban life.

The rural adolescent girls, whose self-image was described in this paper, appear to suffer from low self-esteem when compared to their urban counterparts. We suggested that the social and economic environment may have been important to this finding. The role of the family may be equally important. With the continuous migration of rural populations to the cities the question should be asked: why did those people stay behind? Those who are employed are more likely to have made a positive choice. They may be happy and satisfied and not feel any need or desire to move. Indeed, many people in small towns and on farms express great satisfaction with their communities. But particularly for the parents out of work, we must ask why they do not move

elsewhere. If such parents feel discouraged and hopeless,then this feeling is likely to be communicated to their children. Children, to a large extent, share their parents' value system (Offer and Offer, 1975; Flacks, 1967; M. Anthony, 1969). Hence, low self-esteem may also reflect a familial psychosocial state.

From an intra-psychic point of view we can only speculate that the effect on youngsters of growing up in a psychosocial environment where not much pride, hope and accomplishment was present, would be to dim the youngsters hopes and dreams for their own future. Such a depressed outlook could easily cause low self-esteem. These two feeling states go hand in hand clinically when one sees depreciation of the self in depression. Pural youth may be similar to those inner city youth who have low self-image, in part because their realistic hopes for a satisfying and fulfilling future, are not within reach.

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Table 5

Self-Image Among Older Adolescents in Two Rural Communities[1]

Multivariate Effects[2]

Effect	df	F
Sex	10,96	3.00**
Community	10,96	2.10*
Sex X Comm	10,96	0.30

Univariate Results for Community Effect

	Means			
Scale	Comm A	Comm B	F[3]	Estimated Effect Size[4]
Impulse Control	2.80	2.75	0.09	0.07
Emotional Tone	2.58	2.57	0.00	0.01
Body/Self-Image	2.77	2.49	5.88*	0.47
Social Relations	2.49	2.32	2.12	0.29
Morals	2.65	2.45	3.37	0.39
Sexual Attitudes[2]	2.77	2.56	2.69	0.35
Family Relations	2.44	1.97	12.80***	0.70
External Mastery	2.57	2.27	6.87**	0.49
Voc/Ed Goals	2.02	1.83	2.99	0.33
Psychopathology	2.78	2.56	3.97*	0.38
Superior Adjustment	2.76	2.56	3.38	0.37
Total Score[2]	2.58	2.38	7.14**	0.52
	n=65	n=44		

[1]Ages 16 to 18 years

[2]On 10 scales excluding Sex Attitudes and Total Score which were done in separate univariate analyses (see Univariate Results)

[3]*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

[4]Estimated effect size in standard deviation units. Since all signs are positive, community B adolescents have better self-image than those in Community A.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations

on OSIQ Scales

for Rural Boys and Girls

	Boys		Girls	
Scale	Ages 13-15	Ages 16-18	Ages 13-15	Ages 16-18
Impulse Control	2.74 (.68)	2.72 (.71)	2.95 (.62)	2.86 (.77)
Emotional Tone	2.58 (.59)	2.41 (.65)	2.83 (.65)	2.69 (.56)
Body/Self-Image	2.90 (.58)	2.55 (.53)	3.20 (.64)	2.92 (.61)
Social Relations	2.58 (.49)	2.54 (.70)	2.69 (.61)	2.46 (.53)
Morals	2.95 (.52)	2.89 (.56)	2.66 (.51)	2.48 (.53)
Sexual Attitudes	2.86 (.68)	2.71 (.64)	3.13 (.63)	2.82 (.58)
Family Relations	2.52 (.65)	2.48 (.67)	2.55 (.74)	2.42 (.70)
External Mastery	2.72 (.54)	2.54 (.66)	2.74 (.45)	2.59 (.56)
Vocat/Educ Goals	2.38 (.70)	2.10 (.69)	2.32 (.55)	1.95 (.59)
Psychopathology	2.83 (.63)	2.65 (.54)	3.02 (.47)	2.88 (.59)
Superior Adjustment	2.83 (.50)	2.85 (.63)	2.93 (.46)	2.69 (.54)
Total Score	2.70 (.42)	2.57 (.49)	2.79 (.41)	2.59 (.39)
	n= 33	n= 27	n= 27	n= 38

Table 2

Sex and Age Differences Among
Rural Youth

Multivariate Effects[1]

Source	df	F
Sex	10,112	4.54****[3]
Age[2]	10,112	1.36
Sex X Age	10,112	.45

Univariate Results for Sex Effect

Scale	Means Boys (n=60)	Girls (n=65)	F[3]	Estimated effect size[4]
Impulse Control	2.73	2.90	1.93	-.25
Emotional Tone	2.50	2.75	5.80*	-.43
Body/Self Image	2.74	3.04	9.60**	-.56
Social Relations	2.57	2.55	.00	.02
Morals	2.92	2.55	13.62***	.66
Sex Attitudes	2.79	2.95	2.55	-.29
Family Relations	2.50	2.47	.02	.02
External Mastery	2.64	2.65	.09	-.05
Voc/Educ Goals	2.25	2.11	.83	.16
Psychopathology	2.75	2.94	4.26*	-.37
Superior Adjustment	2.84	2.79	.12	.05
Total Score	2.64	2.67	.45	-.12

[1]Total score and Sex Attitudes are not included here.

[2]Though all ten scales taken together did not differentiate younger from older youth, three scales showed univariate significant differences. Younger youth had poorer Body - and Self-Image, Vocational/Educational Goals, and Sex Attitudes. Total Score showed similar significant age effects.

[3]**** $p < .0001$, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

[4]This is the magnitude of the estimated effect of sex on the self-image scores in terms of standard deviation units. Roughly, this statistic tells how many standard deviations separate the means. A negative sign indicates poorer self-image for girls.

Table 3

Younger Rural Girls Compared with Younger Suburban Girls

Scale	Means: Rural[1]	Means: Suburban[2]	Univariate F[3]	Estimated Effect Size[4]
Impulse Control	2.96	2.53	6.87**	-0.53
Emotional Tone	2.83	2.48	5.05*	-0.45
Body/Self-Image	3.20	2.67	12.91***	-0.72
Social Relations	2.69	2.25	7.96**	-0.57
Morals	2.66	2.20	14.51***	-0.77
Sex Attitudes	3.13	2.91	2.54	-0.32
Family Relations	2.55	2.19	5.72*	-0.48
External Mastery	2.75	2.29	14.51***	-0.77
Vocat/Educ Goals	2.33	1.84	21.90***	-0.94
Psychopathology	3.03	2.39	23.04****	-0.97
Superior Adjustment	2.94	2.45	19.30****	-0.89
Total Score[5]	2.79	2.33	22.66****	-0.96

Multivariate F=3.61****, df= (11,293)

(for overall community effect)

[1] n=27

[2] n=278

[3] **** $p < .0001$
*** $p < .001$
** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$

Table 3 (cont.)

[4]Magnitude of the estimated effect of community type on the self-image scores in terms of in standard deviation units. Roughly, this statistic tells how many standard deviations separate the means of the two groups. A negative sign indicates that the rural girls showed poore self-images.

[5]Total score was tested in a separate analysis, df= (1,190).

Table 4

Older Rural Girls Compared with Older Urban Girls

	Means			
Scale	Rural[1]	Urban[2]	Univariate[3]	Estimated Effect Size[4]
Impulse Control	2.86	2.33	18.63****	-0.78
Emotional Tone	2.69	2.28	9.61**	-0.56
Body and Self-Image	2.92	2.26	37.90****	-1.12
Social Relations	2.46	1.95	22.59****	-0.86
Morals	2.48	1.86	48.77****	-1.26
Sex Attitudes	2.82	2.88	0.52	0.13
Family Relations	2.42	1.86	19.93****	-0.81
External Mastery	2.59	2.08	24.66****	-0.90
Vocat/Educ Goals	1.95	1.66	11.29***	-0.61
Psychopathology	2.88	2.35	27.12****	-0.94
Superior Adjustment	2.69	2.26	19.30****	-0.80
Total Score[5]	2.59	2.09	43.41****	-1.19

Multivariate F=7.62**** df=(11,180)

(for overall community effect)

[1] n=38

[2] n=154

[3] **** $p < .0001$

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

[4]Magnitude of the estimated effect of community type on the self-image scores in terms of in standard deviation units. Roughly, this statistic tells how many standard deviations separate the means of the two groups. A negative sign indicates that the rural girls showed poorer self-images.

[5]Total score was tested in a separate analysis, df= (1,190).